Monday next, December 23rd: Molnar's THE GOOD FAITH (1935), direction by William Wyler, script by Preston Sturges, with Margaret Sullivan, Herbert Marshall; and "Four Facts," an excellent Charley Chase sound 2-reeler with Chase (despite the title) in nine parts; and one other short.

December #2 1968

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"ONE WEEK" (Metro, 1920) Directed by Buster Keaton & Eddie Cline; 2 reels

Considering that it is only the second of Keaton's non-Parade shorts, and thus only the second film designed and co-directed by Keaton himself, "One Week" is an amazing little work, not only in that it pre-dates so many of the later Keaton gags and general bizarre and dream-like style, but most notably in that it is Buster Keaton Calibration N° 1. By the end of the great work that still lay ahead, this is still one of Keaton's cleverest and funniest shorts, milking a single situation with a marvellous array of sight gags, both subtle and slapstick. Near-surrealistic, like many of his films, it is both simply and beautifully done. The titles are in French, but surely no comedy has ever needed titles less, and there is never any doubt about either motivation or action. The only doubt is in the identity of the leading lady, who at times looks awfully like Natalie Talmadge -- and yet at other times definitely doesn't. Since even our usually infallible Gerald McDonald was stumped in this case, this is not the kind of disgrace where only here-Kiri can save Haffian honor -- but we would be most grateful to any member (attention, Ida Belmaney!) who can come to our rescue.

"SURRENDER" (Universal, 1927) Written & Directed by Edward Sloman

Based on the stage play "Lea Lyon" by Alexander Brody; Camera: Gilbert Harren; edited by Edward L. Cahn; Art Direction, Charles D. Hall; Technical assistants, Jack Sieffer & Alexia Davaldoff; Wardrobe: Joanna Makarenko; Production Supervisor, Paul Kohner; 8 reels

With Ivan Mojcikine, Mary Philbin, Nigel de Brulier, Otto Matieson, Otto Fries, Daniel Makarenko, Lester Mathews.

"Surrender." No Mojcikine's only American film, is literally unavailable in this country, and we are most grateful to Kevin Brownlow for lending us this British print. Kevin devotes a good deal of space to the film in his superb new book "The Parad's Gone By" (a "must" for all of you), and I won't steal his thunder by cribbing from his material or quoting from his long interview with director Sloman, other than to repeat Sloman's comments that Lea Lyon gave him the film as a reward for and follow-up to his earlier success "His People," that he was solely responsible for the script, Edward J. Montagne who got the bigger credit being merely the head of the script department, and that Mojcikine who knew no English -- or claimed not to -- had to be directed through an interpreter.

I don't altogether share (though I can understand) Brownlow's great enthusiasm for both "Surrender" and Sloman, but it is a fascinating example of films from that late 1920's marshmallow period of Hollywood when European influence was rampant, and style dominated content in such lush and top-heavy films as "The Love of Sunya" and "Tempest." Most of us saw (and were probably appalled by) "Eternal Love" at the Museum a few weeks back. Even allowing for Barrymore's marital problems at the time, his eye-trouble, his unsuitability to the part, and Lubitsch's seeming lack of rapport with everything, it is a pretty luscious picture, saved only by its handsome visual qualities. When one considers how many films of that type were being made around 1927-29, "Surrender" instantly seems rather better. Admittedly, it can't quite match its opening scenes -- the beautifully done introduction of Mojcikine, the strong and graphic scenes of the Russian invasion. The plot has to take over some time, and it is soon apparent that it is just warmed over "Boule de Suif." Moreover, the characters seem a singularly worthless bunch -- rather like Scene's beloved "little people" in reverse or negative -- and too often one wishes that the dire abstractions promised them by the Russian invaders in those gloriously florid titles, would in fact be carried out. But forget the plot and the people, and see just how much Sloman and screenwriter (of the "Kat and Oscary") do with very little. The crowd scenes are expertly handled, and at times the film almost matches the visual quality of Stiller's "Hotel Imperial." Quite incidentally, its theme makes it sadly topical right now.

Wm. K. Everson

A post-script relative to "One Week" -- the title is relatively meaningless, merely a take-off on Eliman Ojinn's then-current sensation "Three Weeks," but according to Keaton, "only one third as shocking."